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DE RUEHMR #0365/01 1731318

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

O 221318Z JUN 07

FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3087

INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE

RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3459

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000365

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, DS/DSS/OSAC, S/CT, D, P, M, INR, CA, AF/S;  
GABORONE FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM ASEC CASC LT

SUBJECT: LESOTHO JUNE 22 SITREP: A CALM BUT UNCERTAIN CURFEW

REF: A) MASERU 359 AND PREVIOUS; B) MASERU 355 AND PREVIOUS ; C) 2006 MASERU 560 AND 525

MASERU 00000365 001.2 OF 002

**¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY:** On June 22, Maseru remained perfectly calm one week after implementation of a curfew implemented to end attacks on senior political and government figures. The security situation, however, remains unpredictable. There are no signs the Lesotho police have made progress in identifying the perpetrators or in retrieving weapons seized during the attacks.

The curfew remains in effect until further notice. Although the GOL remains silent on the situation, on June 21 the Lesotho Defense Forces and the country's largest NGO coalition each made statements, reflecting confidence in handling the situation and growing frustration with the curfew, respectively. Hopes are high that the return on June 25 of former President of Botswana Masire to commence a SADC-mediated political dialogue will help return the country to normal. The local population is also hopeful that taxi associations and labor unions will not strike, action that would once again paralyze the Maseru economy. END SUMMARY.

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Amid Relative Calm, LDF  
and LCN Issue Statements  
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**¶12. (U)** One week after the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) announced a curfew in response to violent attacks on senior government and political leader residences, Maseru is calm and the GOL is functioning normally. The 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. curfew remains in effect until further notice. The LMPS has given no indication of any progress achieved in identifying the perpetrators of the original attacks (June 10 and 14) or attacks subsequent to implementation of the curfew on military and security personnel, or in retrieving weapons and communication equipment seized during these attacks. Post continues to receive sporadic reports of abuses of civilians by police and military officials at checkpoints during curfew hours. Nonetheless, other than occasional reports of reckless shooting by undisciplined or drunken soldiers, there were no reports of attacks or serious security incidents during the period June 18-22.

**¶13. (U)** On June 21, the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) Public Affairs Office issued a press release regarding the ongoing situation. The statement reads as follows:

BEGIN TEXT.

The Lesotho Defense Forces Public Affairs Office (LDF PAO) hereby informs the nation that following last week's attacks on the LDF personnel on duty at the Honorable Ministers' homes and

at one LDF vehicle checkpoint in Maseru, the Army and the Police have since embarked on massive operations aimed to track down the perpetrators of these heinous criminal activities and discover weapons stolen in these attacks.

It has come to the attention of the LDF Command that these criminals are heavily armed with automatic rifles and roam around disguised in LDF, Lesotho Mounted Police Service, South African Police Service, or private security companies' uniforms.

It has also been discovered that these criminals intention is to bring about confusion to both Police and Army operatives on the ground, and commit criminal activities calculated to hold the nation in the grip of fear by means of torture and hijackings of essential services, Government and state security services vehicles on duty.

Process has since been made in ongoing investigations, and with the use of information furnished by peace loving citizens, the Army is on the right track in its quest to hunt down the attackers. While it is clear that these criminals have declared war on all state security services, the LDF Command therefore appeals for the continued support of all volunteers to provide much needed information that will help the LDF to get to the bottom of these attacks.

(sic) END TEXT.

**¶4.** (U) Also on June 21, the Democracy and Human Rights Commission of the Lesotho Council of NGOs (LCN) released a statement on the curfew situation. LCN is a highly regarded umbrella organization of NGOs operating in Lesotho. The statement noted that various stakeholders in the country have serious concerns regarding the conduct of security personnel on duty during curfew hours. According to the statement, "The prevailing harassment and violation of human rights will ruin the credibility of Lesotho's human rights record in the region and internationally... The Democracy and Human Rights Commission regrets the failure of government to issue any communication on the issue of the curfew."

MASERU 00000365 002.2 OF 002

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The Harvest Factor  
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**¶5.** (U) On June 22, private radio station Harvest FM broadcast a report that it had received a letter allegedly from renegade members of the LDF. In the letter, the authors stated that they would "not be governed by a foreigner," a reference to a recent controversy concerning Prime Minister Mosisili's possession of a South African ID card. The letter also accused PM Mosisili of corruption, citing interest free loans for cabinet members and parliamentarians and the highly criticized acquisition in 2006 by ministers and other senior officials of new Mercedes Benz sedans for only \$500 (ref C).

**¶6.** (U) Following a call berating the radio presenter for reading the letter, another caller who referred to himself as "Khanyapa" (English translation: Anaconda) claimed to be an anti-GOL renegade soldier. He commanded the presenter for reading the letter and stated that his group would "continue its plan." Shortly thereafter, the station announced that the LMPS had detained the radio presenter for questioning.

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A Tense Calm Amid Public Statements  
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**¶7.** (SBU) COMMENT: At week's end Maseru remained perfectly calm, although the unpredictability of the security situation and uncertainties related to the curfew remain. The LCN statement on the curfew reflected generally negative public opinion with the GOL's handling of the situation and growing impatience with the curfew. The LDF's statement demonstrated confidence in handling the security deterioration, but notably made no mention

of coordination with the Lesotho police, allegations of complicity by active or retired military personnel in the violence, or of the June 14 attack on the leader of the opposition. Hopes are high that developments next week will help return the city to normal, including the return on June 25 of former President of Botswana Masire to commence a SADC-mediated dialogue aimed at resolving a political impasse between the GOL and the opposition. The local population is also hopeful that taxi associations and labor unions will not strike, action that would once again paralyze the Maseru economy (ref A). END COMMENT.

MURPHY